Critical Theory: Space, Society and Change

GEOG329 - Graduate School of Geography, Clark University
Professor Mark Davidson

Course Description

Nearly 75 years ago Max Horkheimer, echoing Marx, defined critical theory as distinguished by its attempt to critique and *change* society. It is therefore not simply a tool for understanding, but also a method for overcoming injustice, domination and oppression. Over the past 50 years, geographers have found inspiration in this transformative mode of theorizing in research fields as diverse as housing, resource management, race relations and climatology. But in what state do we find critical theory today? For some geographers, critical theory has transformed into a pluralist venture that is symbolized by a politics of disagreement and a modest normativity. However, others fervently disagree with this project, arguing that we now face unprecedented challenges that cannot be dealt with by this brand of modest theory or, paradoxically, those more assertive types of theory which preceded it. Simply, it is thought that previous critical theory is unable to produce change in an era of reflexive cynicism, sophism and post-political politics. The seminar follows these debates by tracing the ways in which geographers have historically engaged with critical theory and evaluating where this engagement stands today. In order to achieve the latter, the seminar will examine a range of contemporary critical social theory, including an exploration of Slavoj Zizek's claim that we need a new theory of everything(!), Alain Badiou's interpretation of politics as event and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's arguments about critical theory's kernel concern.

Critical Theory: Space, Society and Change

Fall 2010
Wednesday 9-12

Politics after post-structuralism: *A new New Left or new Old Left?*

The purpose of this seminar is to think through the geographical implications of a strand of contemporary critical theory that has sort to rethink progressive politics in response to the devastating critiques of post-structuralists and the decline of actually-existing socialisms. The seminar is a chance for you to explore recent political philosophy and trace out what associations it might have to geographical theory and your own research interests. It is also a forum for you to debate. Much of the literature we will read is provocative and polemic; it will therefore provide substantial opportunity for debate, particularly given the political implications of contemporary critical theory are confronting.

You should be reminded that we read we will read political philosophy texts very much from the outside-looking-in. This is not a political philosophy seminar, nor is this a definite course on critical theory. Rather it is a geography seminar reading some recent political philosophy. Consequently, we will encounter new ideas and theories which are not easily comprehended. The seminars are certainly a space for you to work through these ideas and gaps in understanding. However, all knowledges are partial and we are all differently situated with regards to our personal and academic backgrounds. We are therefore not striving for a complete knowledge of the literatures we encounter, but rather we will develop productive dialogues between ourselves and the different texts.

The seminar's exploration of contemporary critical theory therefore carries on in the recent tradition in geography of questioning foundational ideas, moving away from universalizing theoretical narratives and searching for methodological transparency. However, it does so with reference to a literature that has not completely expelled many of these goals/ideas. Indeed, perhaps what defines the critical theory we will examine is an attempt to engage with ontological and epistemological critique, but without retreating to – in any sense – a political relativism. What unites the critical theory we will explore is therefore a concern for the political and, more specifically, how a leftist politics might be (re)constructed. All the authors therefore assume that our current mode of politics does not, or might not, contain the solutions necessary for the societal problems we face.

Given the critical theorists we will read are not geographers, we will need to be cognizant of how their work is (or is not) related to our theoretical and empirical concerns. To aid us in this, we will at times combine a set of complementary readings drawn from the geographical literature that have engaged with some of the theoretical texts we are interested in. Our attention will therefore have to be focused on both how they interpret the theoretical texts we read directly as well the substantive content of these papers.

Please be sure to give feedback as the seminar goes along. Whilst the basic structure of the readings will not change, we have the opportunity to incorporate and/or substitute various readings. Whether this be references to philosophical texts that you want to follow up on, or readings from other fields that you think might be productive to read within the context of the class, be sure to let me know.

Your responsibilities
It might be a cliché, but you will only get out of the seminar what you put in. We are diving straight into some fairly difficult texts and undoubtedly confronting new terrain. Yet, if you complete the following steps we can use the seminars as a place to explore the texts and debate their relative merits:

- You must complete all the readings; even those not assigned to you
- You must select one reading each week that you will summarize for the group
- Your summary should be delivered to me (email or hardcopy) at the end of each seminar
- For each assigned reading, you should come to class with a number of related discussion questions

In each seminar the group dynamics are different. However, there are some general features you should be aware of:

- There is always a tendency for some people to speak more than others. This is perfectly fine, but everyone should always make a contribution to debate.
- People have read different things, but your familiarity with materials is not a barrier to participation. If you are not confident about the materials, you are feeling the right things. No one is an expert in all the materials we will cover; no matter how much some people try to appear that they are.
- A simple contribution and/or discussion question is usually the best. Don't be afraid to ask what the author means when they say x, y or z.

Class Meetings
We meet every Wednesday at 9am, and our seminar will last until 11:50am. As such, we will intersperse our discussions with one or two breaks.

Website
The syllabus, grades, readings, and other assignments will be posted on the course website (Cicada: https://cicada.clarku.edu), and/or distributed in hardcopy.

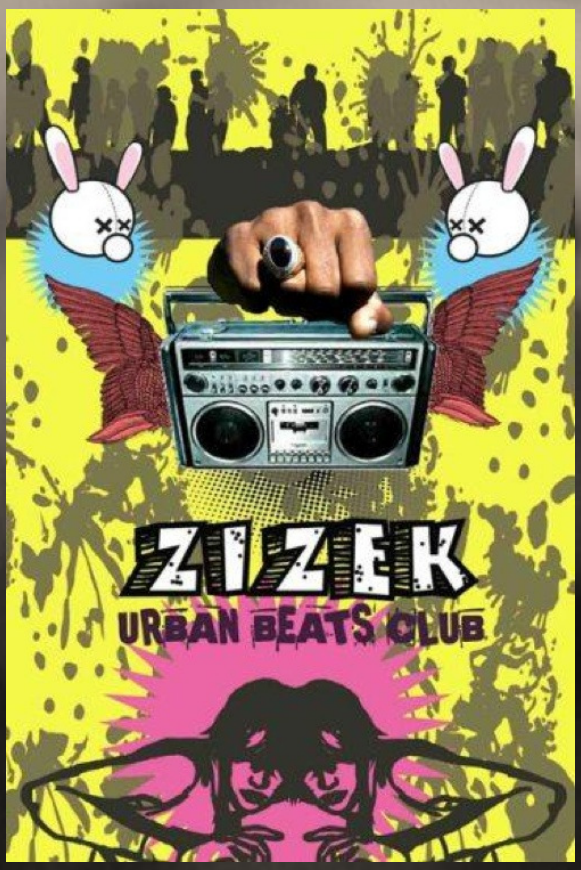
Honor Code
Clark University's policies of academic integrity apply to every aspect of this course. Please see www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm if you have any questions about what this entails.

Special Needs
Persons with disabilities or in need of special accommodations to meet the expectations of this course and take full advantage of learning opportunities are encouraged to contact the office of Disability Services as soon as possible to request such accommodations. Disability Services is located in the Academic Advising Center, 142 Woodland Street, second floor, 508-793-7468. In addition, it would be helpful to bring this to the instructor's attention as early as possible.

Assessment

The course uses a variety of assessment methods. These are:

- *Reading preparation* (20%): At the end of each seminar, you will be asked to provide (i) a short summary (200 words) of each assigned reading and (ii) a list of questions/discussion topics for your particular assigned reading. This submission can be annotated during the seminar discussion, but it should demonstrate evidence of your preparation, comprehension of the readings and intellectual engagement.
- *Class participation* (25%): In-class discussions are pivotal to the learning outcomes of this course. It is intended to both introduce you the subject matter and begin your intellectual engagement. As such, discussing the readings during class is a learning priority. You will be graded on your participation, listening and engagement with others.
- *Reaction paper* (15%): You will be required to write a short (2000 words) reaction paper midway through the course. You will be asked to respond to a statement. This statement will relate to one aspect of the first part of the course.
- *Final paper* (40%): In the latter half of the semester, you will be required to write an extend paper (4000 words) that debates/discusses various aspects of the class literature. This paper will give you the opportunity to explore elements of the course that have particularly interested you.

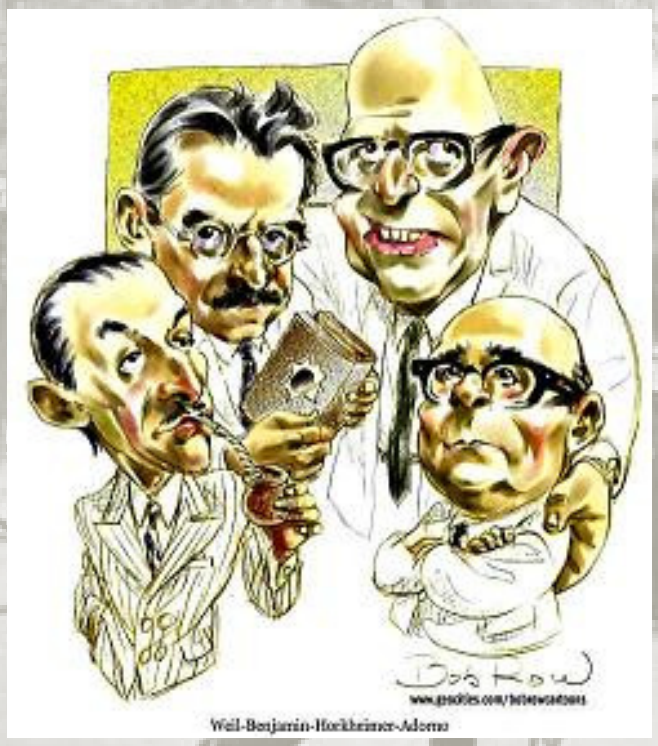


WEEK 1

Introduction – Zizek!

This film pays homage to Slavoj Zizek, the “Elvis of cultural theory”. It features Zizek playing up to the cameras and has some awful depictions of the philosopher cum joker. However, it does serve as an introduction to Zizek’s revolutionary mode of thought, offering a sprinkling of exerts from this extensive critique of contemporary capitalism.

> **"I couldn't help noticing how all the best Marxist analyses are always analyses of a failure ... Like, why did Paris Commune go wrong? Trotskyites. Why did the October Revolution go wrong? And so on ... OK, we screwed it up, but we can give the best theory why it had to happen."** (Zizek)



Part One – INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THEORY

WEEK 2

[What was/is critical theory?]

Commentary

David Held. 1980. "Introduction" in *Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. University of California Press: Berkeley, pp.13-28 **[book]**

David Held. 1980. "Chapter 2: Class, class conflict and the development of capitalism: critical theory and political economy *Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. University of California Press: Berkeley, pp.40-76 **[book]**

David Held. 1980. "Chapter 6: Horkheimer's forumulation of critical theory: epistemology and method 1 in *Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. University of California Press: Berkeley, pp.175-199 **[book]**

Source

Theodore Adorno 1991. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Routledge: London.
- Chapter 8: Free Time, pp.187-197 **[book]**

Max Horkheimer 1937. Traditional and Critical Theory (first statement from the Frankfurt School using the term "critical theory") **[pdf]**

Herbert Marcuse 1968. *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. Mayfly Books: New York
- Chapter 4: Philosophy and Critical Theory, pp.99-118 **[pdf]**

Herbert Marcuse 1964 [1991] *One-Dimensional Man*. Beacon Press: Boston
- Chapter 5: One-Dimensional Thought: Negative Thinking: The Defeated Logic of Protest, pp.123-143 **[book]**

Herbert Marcuse 1955 [1966] *Eros and Civilization*. Beacon Press: Boston
- Political Preface, xi-xxv **[book]**
- Chapter 1: The Hidden Trend of Psychoanalysis, pp.11-20 **[pdf]**

WEEK 3

[Enlightenment tradition]

Emmanuel Kant. 1784. *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* **[pdf]**

Jurgen Habermas 1968. *Knowledge and Human Interests.* Beacon Press: Boston – Part One: The Crisis of Knowledge, pp.1-64 (takes up the questioning of Kant/Enlightenment with regards to critical theory and epistemology) **[book]**

Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno 1947. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA – The Concept of Enlightenment, pp.1-34 **[pdf]**

Herbert Marcuse. 2007. *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse*. Beacon Press: Boston. **[book]**
- "A Note on Dialectic" pp.63-71

Ben Agger 1991. Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociological relevance, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 105-131 **[pdf]**

[Reinterpreting Marx's critical position]

Moishe Postone 1996. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge – Chapter 1: Rethinking Marx's critique of capitalism pp.3-42 **[book]**

Jacques Derrida 1994. *Specters of Marx, the state of the debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Routledge: London – Chapter 1: Injunctures of Marx, pp.3-48 **[book]**

Fredric Jameson 2009. Sandblasting Marx, *New Left Review*, 55, 134-142 **[pdf]**

Herbert Marcuse. 2007. *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse*. Beacon Press: Boston. **[book]**
- "Sartre's Existentialism" pp.128-158

WEEK 4

[Althusser]

Louis Althusser, 1970. Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon, *New Left Review*, I/64, 3-11 **[pdf]**
Louis Althusser, 1965. Contradiction and Overdetermination in *For Marx*. **[pdf]**
Louis Althusser, Marx in his Limits. **[pdf]**

Mark Poster, 1974. Althusser on History without Man, *Political Theory*, 2(4), pp. 393-409 **[pdf]**

Etienne Balibar, 2009. Althusser and the Rue D'Ulm, *New Left Review*, 58, 91-107 **[pdf]**

Norman Geras. 1972 Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment, *New Left Review*, I/71, 75-86 **[pdf]**

Geraldine Friedman, 1995. The Spectral Legacy of Althusser: The Symptom and Its Return, *Yale French Studies*, 88, 165-185 **[pdf]**

McInerney, D. 2005. Althusser's Underground Railroad: From Dialectical Materialism to the Non-Philosophy of the Non-State, *Borderlands*, 4 **[pdf]**

[New Left in Anglo-American thought]

Stuart Hall. 2009. Life and Times of the First New Left, *New Left Review*, 61, 177-196 **[pdf]**

C. Wright Mills. 1960. Letter to the New Left, *New Left Review*, I/5, 18-23 **[pdf]**

EP Thompson. 1959. The New Left, *The New Reasoner*, 9, 1-17 **[pdf]**

IDEOLOGY
CONSULTING
PURIFYING BODY WASH
FREEDOM BODY LOTION
Ideology body lotion moisturises your skin with a low-allergy formulation that contains no sulfate, no added fragrances & no artificial colours
NOURISHING SHAMPOO

Part Two – The Real of Marx (post-Marxism)

Key Text: Zizek, S. 1989. ***The Sublime Object of Ideology***. Verso: London **[book]**

Matthew Sharpe, 2004. *Slavoj Zizek: A Little Piece of the Real*. Ashgate: Aldershot. **[book]**
Chapter 1: Locating Zizek as Critical Theorist

WEEK 5

[Marx thru' Lacan]

Slavoj Zizek, 2006. *How to Read Lacan*. Granta Books: London. 124pp. **[book]**

[On Lacan…]

Jean Roussel. Introduction to Jacques Lacan, *New Left Review*, I/51, 63-70 **[pdf]**
Edward Casey and Melvin Woody. 1983. Hegel, Heidegger, Lacan: The Dialectic of Desire, in Joseph Smith and William Kerrigan (eds.) *Interpreting Lacan*. Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, pp.75-112 **[book]**

WEEK 6

[Lacan and feminism]

Lynne Segal. 1987. *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*. Virago Press: London..
Chapter 4: Beauty and the Beast II: Sex, Gender and Mothering, 117-161 **[book]**

Judith Butler, 1990 [2006]. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge: London. **[book]**
Chapter 2: Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix, pp.47-106 [critique of Lacan's formulation of desire in structural framework; reconfigure through multiplicity and play]

Judith Butler, 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge: London. **[book]**
Chapter 2: The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary, pp.57-92 [critique of Lacan's binary framework for understanding sexuality and desire]

Anup Dhar. 2009. Sexual Difference: Encore, yet again, *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 7, pp. 168-186 **[pdf]**

[Lacan in geography]

Felicity Callard. 2003. The taming of psychoanalysis in geography, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4, 295-312 **[pdf]**

Jean Hillier and Michael Gunder. 2003. Planning Fantasies? An Exploration of a Potential Lacanian Framework for Understanding Development Assessment Planning, *Planning Theory*, 2, 225-248 **[pdf]**

Paul Kingsbury. 2008. Did somebody say jouissance? On Slavoj Zizek, consumption and nationalism, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 1, 48-55 **[pdf]**

David Sibley. 2003. Geography and psychoanalysis: tensions and possibilities, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4(3) 391-399 **[pdf]**

WEEK 7

[Rediscovering ideology]

Slavoj Zizek, 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso: London.pp.263 **[book]**
Chapter 1 – How Did Marx Invent the Symptom? pp.1-56 (Lacan/Marx – ideology introduction; Sloterdijk)
Chatper 2 – From Symptom to Sinthome, pp.57-94
Chapter 3 – Che Vuoi? pp.95-144 (heavy theory; Lacan – (post-)structuralist)

Ernesto Laclau 2006. Ideology and Post-Marxism, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11, 103-114 **[pdf]**

[Commentary]

Matthew Sharpe. 2004. *Slavoj Zizek: A Little Piece of the Real*. Ashgate: Aldershot **[book]**
Chapter 1: On Zizek's Expanded Notion of Ideology, pp.23-54

Tony Myers. 2007. *Slavoj Zizek*. Routledge: London. **[book]**
Chapter4: How can we distinguish reality from ideology?, pp.63-78

Heiko Feldner and Fabio Vighi, 2009. Zizek Notion of Ideology Critique in Context, *International Journal of Zizek Studies*, 4, 1-7 **[pdf]**

WEEK 8

[ideology and consciousness]

Merold Westphal 1998. Hegel's Phenomenology of Perception in Jon Stewart (ed) The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays. State University of New York Press: Albany, pp.122-137**[book]**

Georg Lukacs 1968. *History and Class Consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics*. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA. **[book]**
Chapter 3 – Class Consciousness pp.46-82
Ron Eyerman 1981. False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory, *Acta Sociologica*, 24(1/2), pp. 43-56 **[pdf]**

Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta. 2009. Being-with as making worlds : the 'second coming' of Peter Sloterdijk, *Environment and Planning D : Society and Space*, 27 (1), pp. 1-11 **[pdf]**
Peter Sloterdijk 1988. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis **[book]**
Chapter 1: Cynicism: The Twilight of False Consciousness, pp.3-9
Chapter 2: Enlightenment as Dialogue: Critique of Ideology as Continuation of the Miscarried Dialogue through Other Means, pp.10-21
Chapter 5: In Search of Lost Cheekiness, pp.101-138

James Anderson 1973. Ideology in Geography, *Antipode*, 5(3), 1-6 **[pdf]**
Fabio Vighi and Heiko Feldner. 2007. Ideology Critique or Discourse Analysis: Zizek against Foucault, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 6(2), 141-159 **[pdf]**

WEEK 9

[Ontology and Politics]

Zizek, S. 1999 [2009]. The Ticklish Subject. Verso: London **[book]**
- Chapter 4: Political Subjectivities and Its Vicissitudes, pp.171-244
Zizek, S. 2004. The Parallax View, *New Left Review*, 25, 219-235 **[pdf]** (bracketing; politics)

[Agamben]

Giorgio Agamben, 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press: California
Introduction and Part One: The Logic of Sovereignty, 9-44 **[pdf]**
Rad Borislavov, 2005. Agamben, ontology, and constituent power, *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 13, 173-184 **[pdf]**
Andrew Norris, 2000. Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Living Dead, *Diacritics*, 30, 38-58 **[pdf]**

[ontology and geography – state of exception]

Bülent Diken (2005) 'City of God', *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 9, 307-320 **[pdf]**

Part Three – ANTI-POSTMODERNISM AND NEO-LENINISM (BADIOU)

Key text: Badiou, A. 2002. ***Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil***. Verso: New York. **[book]**

WEEK 10

[truth/event]

Badiou, A. 2006. *Being and Event*. Continuum Press: New York. **[book]**

Author's and Translator's Preface, xi-xxxiii
Chapter 1 – The One and the Multiple: a priori conditions of any possible ontology, pp.23-30

Hallward, P. 2003. *Badiou: A Subject To Truth*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. **[book]**

- Introduction – xxi-xxxvi
- Chapter 4 – Badiou's Ontology, pp.81-106

Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek. 2000. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Verso: London.

- Chapter 2: Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits to Formalism, pp.11-43

[Debate]

Badiou, A. 2007. The Event in Deleuze, *Parrhesia*, 2- 37-44 **[pdf]**

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1980. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. **[book]**
Chapter 10: 1730 – Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible

[Commentary]

Eagleton, T. 2001. Subjects and Truths, *New Left Review*, 9, 155-160 [book review] **[pdf]**

Dewsbury, JD. 2007. Alain Badiou and the event of thought in thinking politics, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 32, 443-459 **[pdf]**

Peter Osbourne 2007. Neo-classic: Alain Badiou's Being and Event, *Radical Philosophy*, 142, 19-29 **[pdf]**

WEEK 11

[communism]

Alain Badiou, 2008. The Communist Hypothesis, *New Left Review*, 49, 29-42 **[pdf]**

Alain Badiou, 2005. Highly Speculative Reasoning on the Concept of Democracy in Metapolitics. Verso: New York **[pdf]**

Slavoj Zizek, 2009. How to Begin from the Beginning, *New Left Review*, 57, 43-55 **[pdf]**

Slavoj Zizek, 2006. Against Populist Temptation, *Critical Inquiry*, 32, 551-574 **[pdf]**

Peter Hallward, 2002. Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice, *Culture Machine: Generating Research in Culture and Theory*, 4 **[pdf]**

Robert Sinnerbrink, 2010. Goodbye Lenin? Zizek on Neoliberal Ideology and Post-Marxist Politics, *International Journal of Zizek Studies*, 4, 1-22 **[pdf]**

[Leninism]

Alain Badiou, 2007. One divides itself into Two. In Lenin Reloaded. Toward a Politics of Truth, ed. by Budgen, Kouvelakis, Zizek, Durham and London: Duke University Pr, 2007, pp. 7-17 **[book]**

Sylvain Lazarus, 2007. Lenin and the Party, 1902-November 1917. In Lenin Reloaded, pp. 255-268

Etienne Balibar, 2007. The Philosophical Moment in Politics Determined by War: Lenin 1914-1916, In Lenin Reloaded, pp. 207-221 **[book]**

Antonio Negri, 2007. What to do today with What is to be done, or rather: The Body of the General Intellect, In Lenin Reloaded, pp. 297-307 **[book]**

WE HAD 99,000 PROTESTORS ON TODAY'S MARCH
OFFICIAL POLICE FIGURES PUT THE NUMBER OF PROTESTORS AT 7,000
QUIET!
KNOW YOUR PLACE
SHUT YOUR FACE!
A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTRY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Part Four – RADICAL EGALITARIANISM

Key text: Ranciere, J. 1998. ***Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy***. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. **[book]**

WEEK 12

[politics]

Jacques Ranciere, 1998. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. **[book]**
- Chapter 1: The Beginning of Politics, pp.1-20
- Chapter 5: Democracy or Consensus, pp.95-122

Jacques Ranciere, 2004. Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man? *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103, 297-310 **[pdf]**

[partition of the sensible]

Jacques Ranciere, 2007. *Hatred of Democracy*. Verso: London **[book]**
- Chapter 1: From Victorious Democracy to Criminal Democracy, pp.5-32
- Chapter 4: The Rationality of a Hatred, pp.71-97

Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. 1989. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Verso: London. **[book]**
- Preface to Second Edition

- Chapter 4 – Hegemony and Radical Democracy pp.149-194

[equality]

Jacques Ranciere, 2001. Ten Theses on Politics, *Theory & Event* 5, 1-16 **[pdf]**

WEEK 13

[commentary]

Hallward, P. 2006. Staging Equality: One Ranciere's Theatrocracy, *New Left Review*, 37, **[pdf]**

[Ranciere and geography]

Mustafa Dikec 2002. Police, politics, and the right to the city, *GeoJournal*, 58, 91-98 **[pdf]**

Mustafa Dikec 2005. Space, politics and the political, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23, 171-188 **[pdf]**

Deborah Dixon, 2009. Creating the semi-living: on politics, aesthetics and the more-than-human, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34, 411-425 **[pdf]**

Chantal Mouffe. 2005. *On the Political*. Routledge: London.
- Chapter 2: Politics and the Political, 8-34

Bulent Diken. 2009. *Nihilism*. Routledge: London. **[book]**
- Chapter 2: Nihilism and the 'social': capitalism, post-politics and terror, pp. 55-89

Eric Swyngedouw. 2010. Apocalypse Forever? Post-political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27(2-3), pp.213-232 **[pdf]**

Eric Swyngedouw 2009. The Antinomies of the Post-political City: In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 33(3), pp.601–20

WEEK 14

[Concluding discussion]